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CIVIL WAR MEMORIES

OCCUPATION OF NEW ORLEANS BY THE 31ST
MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT AND THE FORCES
UNDER COMMAND OF GEN. BUTLER, MAY 1, 1862.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

Paper Read Before the Burnside Post, G. A. R., Washington, D. C., May 9, 1917, by J. B. T. Tupper, 31st Massachusetts Regiment.

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COMRADES:

It is with great pleasure that I greet you this evening, and will occupy a few minutes of your time with some personal reminiscences of our "late unpleasantness."

It was my good fortune to have been a member of the 31st Massachusetts Regiment at the time of the occupation of New Orleans by General Butler and the force under his command in 1862.

Fifty-five years have passed since then, and I have forgotten a great many things, but there are some impressions which have remained on my mind, vivid as of yesterday.

In the first place, let us glance at the situation at that time and the circumstances leading to the movement against New Orleans, which resulted in one of the most brilliant victories of the war and one most far-reaching in its consequences. New Orleans was the largest and most important city in the Southern Confederacy. Before the war it was the chief sugar and cotton mart in the United States. In 1860-1861 it shipped \$25,000,000 worth of sugar and \$92,000,000 worth of cotton, its export trade in these articles being larger than that of any city in the world.*

Situated about 100 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, it was the emporium and natural outlet of the Mississippi Valley. Its population in 1860 was nearly 170,000, more than that of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and Richmond combined.

From a political, as well as a military point of view, it was important that this strategic position should be in possession of the Union forces.

Early in the war the attention of the Government was occupied with plans for its capture.

*(Jefferson Davis' "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government," vol. 2, p. 210; Greeley's "The American Conflict," vol. 2, p. 85.)

In November, 1861, Commodore D. D. Porter reported to the Secretary of the Navy his plan for capturing the city. The Secretary of the Navy proposed that the matter be laid before the President. President Lincoln approved the project, and remarked: "This should have been done sooner. The Mississippi is the backbone of the rebellion; it is the key to the whole situation."

The plan was to fit out a naval expedition, with a powerful mortar flotilla, the army to furnish troops for occupying the city after its capture.

Edwin M. Stanton, who succeeded Simon Cameron as Secretary of War, was a man of great energy and comprehensive intellectual grasp. A conference between him and General Butler resulted in a decision to make a vigorous effort to capture the city and hold the lower Mississippi. General McClellan, with his usual caution, thought the proposed expedition was not feasible, as it would, in his opinion, take 50,000 men. General Butler asked for only 15,000.

The rendezvous for the army of occupation was at Ship Island, about ten miles off the coast of the State of Mississippi, midway between New Orleans and Mobile. The naval forces were placed under the command of Capt. David G. Farragut, then sixty years of age.

Farragut sailed early in January, 1862. He was instructed when Porter's mortar fleet arrived to collect such vessels as could be spared from the blockade and proceed up the Mississippi River and reduce the defenses which guarded the approaches to New Orleans, take possession of the city, and keep possession until troops should arrive.

The 31st Massachusetts, after a winter in camp at Pittsfield, sailed from Boston, February 21, 1862, and reached Ship Island, after various adventures, the latter part of March.

After Farragut had arranged the naval part of the programme, the military forces, under General Butler, were placed on transports and followed the fleet to the mouth of

the Mississippi. During the battle we were on the river, a few miles below, awaiting the result.

Perfect security was felt by the people at New Orleans. One of the journals at that time said: "Our only fear is that the Northern invaders may not appear. We have made such extensive preparations to receive them that it were vexatious if their invincible Armada escapes the fate we have in store for it."

The forts, Jackson and St. Philip, one on each side of the river, about 75 miles below the city, were depended upon as the main defense.

After several days of ineffectual bombardment, Farragut decided to make an attempt to run by.

In the early morning of April 24 he succeeded, after a desperate battle, in passing with the largest part of his fleet.

He proceeded up the river to New Orleans, and the city surrendered to him April 25.

The forts surrendered a few days later, allowing the transports with troops to pass up the river.

It would be superfluous to rehearse the story of the bombardment, the passage of the forts by the fleet, and the destruction of the Confederate gunboats and other obstacles supposed to render New Orleans secure from approach by a hostile force. Suffice it to say, the deeds of that eventful day added new luster to the history of our Navy and advanced Farragut to the front rank among the naval heroes of the world.

I recall the beautiful morning of May 1, 1862, as the 31st Massachusetts, with other regiments of the army of occupation, steamed up the Mississippi after the battle. The birds were singing, and all seemed quiet and peaceful as we passed plantations and orange groves and saw the banks with their semi-tropical verdure. Our hearts were exultant. It seemed like a holiday. We arrived before New Orleans about mid-day. The wide levee in front of the city was occupied by a large and curious crowd of spectators, of both sexes and all

ages and races, gathered to see the "Yankees." A bright uniform was now and then conspicuous in the crowd. After what seemed a long delay, orders were given to a detail of the 31st Massachusetts, to which I belonged, to clear the levee preparatory to disembarkation. We were cautioned not to engage in any conversation with the onlookers, nor to answer any taunts or unpleasant remarks that might be made. There was no fear of any armed opposition, as the populace was in awe of the gunboats at anchor in the river, with their guns pointing to the city, but we did not know what might happen in case some excitable and irresponsible persons should make a demonstration.

The crowd pressed back, without any trouble or resistance, making room for the troops to land.

The honor of being the first to land was given to the 31st Massachusetts. Then came a splendid regiment from Wisconsin, commanded by Colonel, afterwards General, Paine. A few pieces of artillery and a Connecticut regiment followed, in all a force of about 2,500 men.

Line was formed and the troops began to march; General Butler and staff at the head of the column, on foot, following the band, playing National airs, a file of the 31st Massachusetts on each side. No horses had been landed, and the battery of artillery was drawn by hand.

We passed through some of the principal business streets, crowds lining the sidewalks and pressing into the street, hurrahing for Jeff Davis and Beauregard. One thing I remember, seeing bodies of cavalry riding rapidly across the streets a few blocks away and wondering what there was to hinder them swooping down on us and stopping our march.

I remarked to one of my comrades: "There are more rebel soldiers here than there are Union." I found out afterwards that they were the foreign legion, composed of foreign residents, organized for home service to preserve order. They offered their services afterwards to General Butler, to assist in preserving peace, but he declined to accept. They were

in sympathy with the Confederates, as shown later, when, upon being disbanded, they sent their arms to Beauregard.

By the time we reached the Custom House, our camping place for the night, it was nearly dark. The Connecticut regiment bivouacked on the levee.

The capture of New Orleans was the greatest victory that at that time had been achieved by the Union forces.

A blow was struck that staggered the Confederacy, from which it never recovered. Union men took heart again, and its effects were felt in England and throughout Europe.

Slidell wrote from Paris to Benjamin, Secretary of State of the Confederacy, that if New Orleans had not fallen, the recognition of the Confederacy would not have been much longer delayed.

General Butler's first order, issued at disembarkation, was against plundering by the soldiers.

That did not prevent, however, those who were on guard the first night at the Custom House from ransacking the post-office in the same building and securing postage stamps and specimens of Confederate money. I may have some yet.

General Butler's administration was marked by rigor and decision from the moment of his arrival. On the same day (May 1) he issued a proclamation of some length, establishing martial law, providing for taking the oath of allegiance, notifying all persons holding allegiance to the Confederate States that they would be treated as enemies and rebels, enjoining the inhabitants to pursue their usual avocations, forbidding assemblages of persons in the streets tending to disorder, establishing a censorship of the press, etc.

The New Orleans *True Delta* refused to print the proclamation and its publication was suspended.

May 13 an order was issued, stating that, as several churches were proposing to observe a day of fasting and prayer "in obedience to some supposed proclamation of one Jefferson Davis," no such observance be had. Churches

were to be kept open, as in time of peace, but no exercises were allowed upon the supposed authority above mentioned.

Another order directed that six Confederate soldiers, captured at forts Jackson and St. Philip, who violated their parole of honor and were convicted by a military commission, should be shot to death. I am happy to state, however, that clemency prevailed and the order was not carried out.

The celebrated "Woman Order," about which so much has been said and written, was issued May 15, Gen. Order No. 28, to the effect that females who offered insults to officers or soldiers of the Union army were liable to be treated as "women about town" plying their avocation.

In my experience in New Orleans, where I remained for several months, going about the city night and day, I never met an insult or experienced any trouble from man or woman. Others, however, report differently.

I remember one gentleman in particular with whom I had frequent discussions on the merits of the issues at stake between North and South, and we aired our diverse views in a jovial and friendly manner, entertaining nothing but kind and cordial feelings to each other individually.

Being detached from my regiment and assigned to duty with the quartermaster of the post, I had opportunities, when not on duty, of going about and mingling with the people, whom I found friendly disposed, as a rule, and willing to aid the Government by personal service for a suitable remuneration, or to dispose of articles needed or desired for a *quid pro quo*.

The use of Confederate notes as currency lasted but a short time, and many people were glad to get work under Uncle Sam and receive pay in greenbacks.

No doubt bitterness rankled in the hearts of many, but who could blame them. While the cannon was booming outside, mothers and fathers, with sons in the Confederate Army, friends, neighbors, and sweethearts were naturally in sympathy. I respected the men or women who had the courage

and the conscience to register their names as "enemies," under Butler's order, and take the consequences.

New Orleans had not been a radical secession city. Her interests were with the Union, and Bell and Everett were popular candidates for President and Vice-President in 1860, Bell having received more votes than either Douglass or Breckenridge. 60,000 took the oath of allegiance before General Butler left the Department.

It is not my purpose to give an account of General Butler's regime in New Orleans. His course was arbitrary and severe, but justified by the conditions which existed, and that will be the verdict of history. A man of great administrative ability was needed, and he proved equal to the task, preserving order, furnishing labor for the unemployed, feeding the populace, keeping the city clean and healthy, and handling with a master hand questions relating to civil and municipal administration. I remained through his administration, performing services in various lines of duty in the Quartermaster's Department clerical and administrative. After him came General Banks, with a larger army.

One day, in July, 1863, an order was received at headquarters from the Secretary of War, directing my discharge, to enable me "to accept a position in the Navy Department."

This order was unsought by me, as I expected to remain in the service for the period of enlistment. I took immediate steps, however, to comply without grumbling, as was my custom when I received orders, and, after fraternizing with the captured Confederates at Port Hudson and witnessing their parole and saying good-bye and good luck to comrades, left for home via the Mississippi and Cairo.

I prize this certificate of discharge and the testimonial received from the State of Massachusetts as evidencing some participation, however slight and humble it may be, in the war in defense of the Union, and in events which called into exercise the best qualities of American manhood and added bright spots to the kaleidescope of American history.

It would be interesting if I had time to follow the fortunes of the regiment and tell of its exploits in fields and bayous, on the march and at the siege, and the "forlorn hope," till after four years of service the boys, now become veterans, returned their tattered flags to the State of Massachusetts to be preserved among her priceless relics. All honor to these veterans! Their ranks are rapidly diminishing, but they are fortunate and to be envied, those that have gone and those that are left, for their eyes have seen the glory of the Lord.



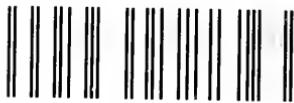
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